

IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION ON THE LAND TENURIAL SYSTEM OF COCHIN AND TRAVANCORE

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ABSTRACT

The term tenurial simply denotes a right, or mode of holding or occupying something of value for a period of time. Under feudal system the principal item of holding was land by which a person held land from a superior in exchange for the rendition of service and loyalty to the grantor. The countries like India, land tenurial systems were widely seen constituted major portion of the income of the country. Even before the establishment of the British Rule land revenue was the major source of income of India. In the princely states like Travancore and Cochin the situation was not different. With the advent of the British rule they introduced many reforms in existing land tenurial systems in Travancore and Cochin State in order to foster their colonial interests. The consequences of the Great depression had severe impact upon land tenurial system of the country. This paper examines how the Great economic Depression affected the land tenurial system in Travancore and Cochin which were most powerful princely states in India during that time.

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INTRODUCTION

Land tenure system is basically a relationship that can be legally or customarily defined among people as individuals or groups, with respect to land. Land tenure is an institution based on the ownership and proprietary right upon land. Rules of tenure defines how property rights to land are to be allocated within societies. They define how access is granted to rights to use, control, and transfer land, as well as associated responsibilities and restraints. In simple terms, it is the land tenure systems which determine who can use, what resources for, how long, and under what conditions.

Land tenure is an important part of social, political and economic structures of a country. It is multi-dimensional which brings into play social, technical, economic,

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institutional, legal and political aspects that are often ignored but must be considered. Land tenure relationships may be well-defined and enforceable in a formal court of law or through customary structures in a community.

The Great Depression was a worldwide phenomenon which had its impact throughout the world irrespective of its bigger or smaller status. The sources of a nation's wealth were mostly from agricultural lands, manufacture, trade and commerce. Among the resources of state revenue the land revenue assumed greater importance in India. In the course of history different land tenures evolved in Cochin and Travancore. Both the premier princely states of Kerala remained basically agricultural tracts. Land revenue constituted the most important source of revenue of the state. Therefore primary aim of the British administrators in was to capture the control of land revenue system in Travancore and Cochinstates. The British after the establishment of their domination followed the policy of maximization of revenue and adopted measures for maximization of production. They made Comprehensive land revenue assessments. As a part of the maximisation of land revenue and production and to fulfil their political motives, the British followed a policy of showing undue importance to the Jenmi system Travancore and Cochin. This policy gave birth to tenurial protests in the region fanned by communal feelings.

But the British took no interest in finding lasting solution to the tenurial problems in Travancore and Cochin. The exorbitant demand of revenue by the British from Cochin and Travancore rulers had its impact on the agrarian sector. The condition of the agricultural class of Cochin was worse than that of their counterparts in Travancore due to the excessive collection of tax. Supportive mechanisms for the effective implementation of the land revenue reforms were absent in Cochin, although the Cochin rulers were keen to prevent any form of unrest connected with the tenurial system of the state.

Certain lands were exempted from taxation. When the financial crisis gathered momentum during the days of the Great Depression, due to the pressure of the colonial rulers the governments of both Travancore and Cochin tried to tax the land that were once excepted from taxation. The condition of tenants under the different tenurial systems became miserable during the days of the Great Depression. Although the Great Depression started in 1929, its effects on Indian economy began to be evident from 1930 onwards.^[1] During the period of the Great Depression from 1929 to 1937, exports and imports fell and it drastically crippled the trade and commerce of the country.

The railways and the agricultural sector were badly affected through the rapid spread of Great Depression. The international financial crisis combined with detrimental policies adopted by the British Government in India resulted in soaring prices of commodities. But agriculturalists did not get adequate price to their products. High prices along with the stringent and exorbitant rate of taxes prevalent had a dreadful impact on the princely states like Travancore and Cochin. The farmers found it very difficult to function under such a situation.

In order to understand the impact of Great Depression on land tenurial system in Travancore and Cochin State it is essential to understand earlier land relations and related legislations existed in both princely states controlling land tenurial systems. It is seen that until 1865, the tenurial relations were controlled by customs and some obligations. The first royal proclamation in this regard was made by Maharaja Ayilliam Tirunal Rama Varma who took some initiative and issued Proclamation on 2 June 1865. In 1896 Jenmi-Kudiyar

Regulation was passed. In 1933 it was amended and amendment brought certain drastic changes in the Jenmie - Kudiyan relations.

Lands in Travancore are broadly classified into three categories viz., *jenmam*, *sirkaror pandaravaka* and others. The *Jenmam* tenure comprises lands that were entered before independence in the *Sirkar* (Government) Revenue Accounts under the heads of *Devaswomvaka*,^[2] *Brahmaswomvaka* and *Madambimarvaka*. The first two groups related to lands belonging to private *Devaswoms* and *Brahmaswoms*. The third embraced all lands owned by non-Brahmins and non-*Devaswomjenmis*. Originally, the distinguishing feature of *Jenmam* lands was that they were tax-free. Some of them were subjected to a light tax called *rajabhogam* when they passed from the original owners to others for a money consideration. Until the Land Tax Proclamation of 1946 a basic tax that introduced on all these lands was continued.^[3]

Whatever be the origin of the *Jenmam* lands, it is evident that *Jenmam* lands were regarded as the absolute private property of the owner. Bulk of the land was owned by the Nambudiris.^[4] The Jenmis (landlords) created some types of subordinate tenures from simple lease (*verumpattom*) to outright sale (*attipper*) in Travancore as in other parts of Kerala. The most important of such tenures was the *Kanappattom* tenure. The *kanappattom* is a combination of a lease and mortgage lease which entitles the *Jenmi* (landlord) to rent, and mortgage which entitles the *kudiyan* mortgagee to so much of the usufruct as is equal in value to the interest of the sum advanced by him.^[5] The tenant under this tenure has the right to cultivate or sub-lease the land. Every year he pays a fixed rent, from which the interest on the sum advanced by him to the *jenmi* (*kanam* sum) is deducted. Besides the rent, several other customary and regular payments had to be paid. The payments usually made by the *kudiyan* to the *jenmi* in the past could be grouped under three heads: (1) annual, (2) occasional, and (3) once in twelve years.

The annual payments consisted of

- (a) *michavaramor* rent fixed by the deed and
- (b) *onakazchaor ulsavakkoppu* i.e., gifts by the *kudiyan* at the time of Onam festival or, at the time of the annual festival of the temple.

There were several occasional payments on various ceremonial occasions such as the *chorunu*, or the initial rice-giving to a child, the upanayanamor investing with the Brahminical thread etc. When the *jenmi* happened to be a *Devaswom*, the tenant had to pay what is called *Kalasavarifees* for conducting purificatory ceremonies in the temples. The periodical fee was ordinarily renewable once in 12 years. Along with that there were also certain customary payments, in cash or kind, at the time of Onam, or on other important occasions.^[6]

For a long time the *jenmis* and *kudiyans* generally exercised their respective rights without prejudice to each other. Of course, this was after the Brahmin authority and rights and the canonical caste rights became part of the social system. Landlord-tenant relations were gradually determined by custom. But as population increased and as society changed, its character under the impact of western civilization, the situation changed significantly. During the British regime law began to take the place of custom. Eviction came to be accepted as a right, though under the age-old customs, a *kanappattom* tenant was seldom evicted. A sense of insecurity on account of the *jenmi's* right of eviction became a chief cause

of complaint by the cultivating peasants. The *jenmis* also began to demand exorbitant rents. This led to serious discontent among the agricultural classes.

Therefore, the Maharaja of Travancore commanded the courts by an order of 1830 to maintain the old established custom. It enjoined that the tenants had to pay the *jenmi* his usual ordinary and extraordinary dues and let the tenant remain in possession and enjoyment of the property. This restored amicable relationship between *jenmis* and tenants for a time. But in less than forty years discontent again manifested itself. The provisions of the Royal command of 1830 were found to be inadequate and it was superseded by another proclamation in 1867.

In Travancore the monarchy was more powerful and the state was the largest owner of land. Therefore, the state could follow a policy of curbing the landlords favouring the cultivators. The progressive and enlightened policy together with its position as the largest owner of land made attempts in land reforms more successful. It was hailed as the 'Magna Carta' of the Travancore peasants because it conferred ownership title to all the tenants of *Pandaravaka* and even though it was subject to the due payment of land revenue and made land a heritable, saleable and mortgageable commodity. By that, the *kanam* tenure was recognised as a perpetual lease and the tenants were given fixity of tenure subject to the payment of a fair rent determined by custom or contract.

By the Pattam Proclamation of 1867 conferred the ryots fixity of tenure on holders of state owned lands, and converted a large body of ryots from the position of tenants at will to that of proprietors.^[7] But in its operation it did not satisfy either the *jenmi* or the *kudiyans*. So the Jenmi-Kudiyam Regulation of 1896 was passed.^[8] The *kudiyans* (*Kanappattom* tenant) right of occupancy was declared to be a permanent right exempt from eviction except on non-payment of rent - continuously for twelve years or of refusal to take a renewal within the time fixed and on wilful committing of waste.

After the enactment of Jenmi-Kudiyam Regulation of 1896 things went on smoothly for nearly a decade. But later on *jenmis* and *kudiyans* made repeated representations regarding various difficulties they faced in the working of Jenmi-Kudiyam Regulation of 1896 the Regulation. In 1915 a committee was appointed to go into the question. In the light of its recommendations a Bill was published in 1924. This met with severe opposition from the landlords. So, it was modified after a round table conference of all the interests. In 1933, the Government passed a regulation which has cut the Gordian knot of the *jenmi* and *kudiyam* problem.^[9]

The *Jenmis* who were regarded as landholders were practically reduced to the position of persons entitled merely to certain dues called *jenmikaram*. The fees due to the *jenmis* such as renewal fees, customary payments etc. were converted into annual payments. This, along with the annual *michavaram*, was termed *jenmikaram*. Under Jenmi-Kudiyam Regulation of 1896 amended in 1933 the rights of the *jenmis* were restricted and *kudiyans* became owners of land subject to the payment of *jenmikaram*.^[10]

Besides *Kanappattom*, there were a number of other tenures relating to *jenmom* property such as *verumpattom*, *koolikanom*, *koolikarazhma*, *otti*, etc. *Verumpattom*, refers to a simple temporary lease. *Koolikanam*, while resembling the *verumpattom*, confers on the tenant the right to make improvements on the land for which he is entitled to receive compensation on the expiry of his term. *Koolikarazhma* means a planting lease executed by

the jenmi in regard to his properties lying waste for improving them, on receipt of a consideration fixed by calculating the number of trees to be planted. It was customary when the trees began to bear fruit to assess the *pattom* or rent and to obtain a fresh document from the jenmi. *Ottim* means usufructuary mortgage. In this transaction an amount is borrowed by the jenmi on the security of his land and the property is left with the kudiyan for enjoyment of its produce as interest for the amount. There were no legislations in Travancore covering each one of these tenures prior to independence, except those relating to *kanappattom*.^[11]

Sirkaror *Pandaravaka* lands refers to lands which the rulers or Government owned or acquired and on which certain tenures arose. The Travancore Settlement Report (1911) recorded 177 tenures under wet lands and 135 under garden lands. It is very difficult to ascertain the origin and meaning of all of them at present. Most of the tenures had their origin in bygone times when the country 'has split up into petty chieftdoms and when public transactions were conducted after the fashion of private dealings and when rights and obligations affecting land were created in numerous ways such as conquest, escheat, transfer by jenmis to kings for their maintenance, and accretions by rivers, lakes, etc. A striking analogy thus may be seen between Sirkar land tenures and those prevalent among *jenmam* lands.

The main tenures under Sirkar lands fall broadly under the following heads: (1) *Pandarapattom*, (2) *Inam*, (3) *Viruthi*, (4) *Thiruppu-varam*, and (5) special tenures.^[12]

(1) **Pandarapattom tenure** was originally in the nature of a lease without any proprietary or transferable rights. By the Royal Proclamation of 1865 the Rajah of Travancore gave the holders of these lands full proprietary rights and the lands were declared to be private, heritable, saleable and otherwise transferable property'. This Proclamation, together with the Jenmi-Kudiyan Proclamation of 1867, was hailed as the Magna Carta of the Travancore ryots. It was also held that the Proclamation of 1865 brought about 'a distribution or diffusion of landed property among all classes of His Highness' subjects and the evils arising from land monopoly have thus been remedied to a considerable extent. Though these may be tall claims, it is certain that these legislations were far in advance of the time, especially when compared to the situation in the British Indian Provinces.^[13]

(2) **Inams** were grants of lands made by ruling princes, chieftains, or great jenmis from time to time either for some service rendered or to be rendered to the State or Sovereign, as a mark of royal favor. *Inams* were of two kinds—service *inams* and personal *inams*. *Inams* granted for specified services were service *inams* while those granted for the support of individuals or families were personal *inams*. By a Royal Proclamation of 1912, personal *inams* were given freedom to mortgage, to sell or transfer them in any manner, subject only to the payment of quit-rent.^[14]

(3) **Viruthi**: These were service grants to which were attached certain obligations in the shape of personal labour and supply of provisions such as vegetables to the sovereign. The holders of Viruthi lands enjoyed these lands in return for the services offered. By the Viruthi Proclamation of 1882, this system was revised. The Proclamation provided for a re-arrangement of the services and the settlement of the surplus lands remaining and re-distribution of those lands relinquished by the holders seeking relief from the service under

the terms offered by the Proclamation. All alienation of *Viruthi* lands made by the holders were declare dull and void by the Proclamation.^[15]

(4) **Thiruppuvaram** is an assignment, in favour of a third party, of a specific portion of land revenue payable to Government by the holders of specified land. Since the assignments are old ones, the circumstances under which they were made cannot now be fully traced. In some cases it was probably the interest on money lent to or due by the Government. In other cases, it may be the *michavaram* due to the jenmi from a tenant when the interests of the jenmi lapsed to Government by escheat or otherwise. In certain other cases it was probably an allowance or gift to a religious or charitable institution. In all these cases, the *thiruppu* holder (one who is entitled to receive *Thiruppuvaram*) used to collect the *varam* direct from the holder of the land on which it is charged.^[16]

(5) **Special tenures:** These comprise tenures in the nature of *inam* which received special treatment and were charged special rates of assessment. Besides these, there were innumerable, other minor tenures which were gradually eliminated, even before independence, and all land brought under *Pandarapattom*. The Travancore Enfranchisement of *Sirkar Pattom* Lands Proclamation, 1940, sought to confer on all holders of *Sirkar* lands permanent rights of occupancy heritable and transferable.^[17]

Besides the above tenures the following tenures which occupy a position different from *Jenmam* and *Pandaravakai* (1) *Edavakai*, (2) *SreePandaravaka*, (3) *Kandukrishi*, and (4) *SreePadamvaka*.

(1) **Edavakai lands:** There were four *Edavakais* (free hold estates) in the State which were free from assessment. They were Edappally, Poonjar, Vanjipuzha and Kilimanoor. The landlords were called 'Chiefs'. The total extent of land under these was about 1.23 lakh acres. The Edavakai Chiefs were the absolute proprietors of the lands till recently. They bore some resemblance to the Zamindaris in other parts of India. The proclamations of 1865 and 1867 which conferred permanent occupancy rights on the tenants of *Sirkar* and *Jenmom* lands were not applicable to Edavakai lands. Permanent occupancy right was sought to be granted to the tenants of Kilimanoor and Edappally Estates in 1893 by the Estates Rent Recovery Regulation of the year. Many years later in 1934 the tenants of Poonjar and Vanjipuzha were given permanent occupancy rights under the Edavakai Regulation of that year. However, as there were several exemption clauses in these legislations the tenants' rights were not fully implemented.

(2) **Sree Pandaravaka lands:** The *Sree Pandaravaka* lands belong to the deity of Sree Padmanabhaswami temple and have been held in trust by the kings of Travancore since the days of King Marthanda Varma. A portion of these lands was assessed to *Rajabhogam* or a light tax by the Government while the residual assessment is paid to the temple for its upkeep and maintenance. These lands lying in Kerala consist of about 12,360 acres. They were exempted from the purview of the basic tax of 1946.^[18]

(3) **Kandukrishi lands:** The crown lands or the home-farms of the Travancore sovereigns fall in this category. They were given on simple leases, recoverable at pleasure. The ryots had not only no proprietary rights; they did not even have transferable rights. The rent was generally fixed and was payable in grain. Though the tenants were, strictly speaking, no more than tenants-at-will, they were not generally interfered with so long as they paid the rent regularly. The total extent of the land was about 19,400 acres.

(4) **Sreepadam lands:** *Sreepadam* lands also belonged to the ruling family of the former Travancore State. The total area of *Sreepadam* lands in Kerala is 14,600 acres. The *Sreepadam* lands belonging to the Sreepadam Palace (belonging to the Attingal Rani) were not assessable under the tax proclamation of 1946.^[19]

The land tenurial of Cochin was not as complicated as that of Travancore. The *kanam*, *verumpattom* and *inams* are the major types of tenures in the Cochin area. The tenancy legislations of Travancore had its influence in the Cochin State. The earliest law in Cochin on this subject was the *Theetorum* of the Raja of Cochin in 1863,^[20] preventing eviction of *kanam* tenants before a period of 12 years. This was not strictly implemented. The tenants clamoured for more reforms. The Landlord-Tenant Commission of 1909 was appointed to study the problem. On their recommendation was passed the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1915. It gave fixity of tenure to those who took holdings before 1885, and also provided for payment of compensation for improvements made, in case of evictions.^[21] But as a tenancy reform the Act did not go far enough.

The *kanam* tenure of Cochin is substantially the same as the *kanapattom* of Travancore. There are differences in regard to the practice of customary payments, rate of interest, etc. In Cochin the deduction from the *kanam* amount was generally made at a fixed rate of 5 per cent, while there was no uniformity in the Travancore area. Further, the *kanam* tenure of Travancore had the benefit of the earlier legislation of the Jenmi Kudiyan Act of 1896, which practically conferred ownership rights to the *kanam* tenants.^[22]

Panayam holdings which had the same incidents of *kanam* holdings lay outside the provisions of this Act. Evictions were rampant. The number of disputed cases between landlords and tenants increased. Under these circumstances was passed the Proclamation 3 of 1112 (M.E.) (1936). It made all *panayam* holdings that had the main incidents of *kanam* holdings as expressed in the Cochin Tenancy Act (1915) and was of 30 years duration on the day on which that Act came into force to stand on the same footing as *kanam* holdings of the same duration.^[23] It superseded the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1915 and conferred security of tenure on *kanams* which originated between 1885 and 1915. It also restricted the grounds for eviction of the *kanam* tenants.

As the number of cases increased, two years later the Government was compelled to pass a fresh legislation defining more precisely the rights and obligations of the land-lords and tenants. It was also necessary to amend the law relating to compensation for improvements made by the tenant. Hence was passed the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938. This act gave fixity of tenure to *kanam* tenants of private lands. But it was subject to various conditions. The permanency was only for a period of 12 years subject to the payment of renewal fees. Eviction was permitted in the event of the denial of the landlord's title, wilful acts of waste and if the landlord required the land for building a residence for himself. It is obvious that a liberal interpretation of such provisions would favour the landlord.

Another relief measure to the ryot was the Cochin Verumpattomdars Act of 1943. This legislation granted every verumpattodar a fixity of tenure in respect of his holding and he could not be evicted on any ground. The tenant was allowed full occupancy right and the rent to be paid by him was fixed in proportion to the value of the produce. This new Act was undoubtedly the 'Magna Carta' of the tenants.^[24]

The *verumpattom* of Cochin was the same as that of Travancore. While the *kanam* tenants got protection under the various tenancy acts, the *verumpattom* tenants were left

out. In Cochin the *verumpattom* tenants became a problem only from the beginning of this century. With the increase in population and the emergence of a class of new investors interested only in rent, who purchased land attracted by the growing prices of agricultural produce, tenants at will registered an increase in *Pandaravaka* and *Puravakalands*. They began to agitate for reform. The Cochin Verumpattom Tenants Act of 1943 was the result of it.^[25]

According to this Act the *verumpattom* tenants could be evicted only for non-payment of rent or destructive acts of waste or willful denial of jenmi's rights, etc. This Act also fixed a sort of fair rent by Statutes, recognizing and fixing the customary rent as fair rent. The Cochin Verumpattom Tenants Act of 1943 protected the interests of the tenants at will and granted security of tenure to leases and subleases in respect of their holdings.^[26] The provisions of this Act were not applicable to the *verumpattom* tenants of Devaswom lands. Hence a few months after the passing of the Act, the *Devaswom Verumpattom* (settlement) Proclamation was promulgated. It gave the *pattadars* (tenants) permanent right of occupancy in respect of their holdings.^[27]

This Act also lay down that *pattadars* should not be evicted for arrears of rent. But this Act cannot be considered to have had the desired effect. It did not affect the *verumpattomdars* on Devaswom lands. Further, evictions continued and the Cochin Government was compelled to pass firmer measures protecting the interests of the *verumpattomdars* or staying the eviction proceedings. The Proclamation I of 1119 (1944) extended the time fixed for *pattom* payment in respect of garden lands where the major crop was coconut. Proclamation 2 of the same year stayed suits instituted against *verumpattomdars* for eviction on the grounds of non-payment of *pattom* and extended the time for payment.^[28]

Inams in Cochin were similar to the type found in Travancore. *Otti*, *Kuzhikanom*, *Varam* and such other tenures found in Travancore existed in the Cochin area also. But the *varam* tenure or share-cropping tenure was not recognised legally before independence either in Travancore or in Cochin though such a system was widespread in these States.^[29]

It is to be noted that the British colonialism drastically changed the tenurial systems in Travancore and Cochin. Introduction of private ownership on the land was product of the British rule that turned upside the existing land tenurial systems in Travancore and Cochin. Thus prior to the British rule, Jenmis, had not enjoyed absolute ownership over their land and the Jenmis the power for arbitrary evictions and rack renting. Introduction of the private ownership over the land and day to day deteriorating economic conditions of the British Empire following Great economic Depression forced them to collect exorbitant rate of land tax from Agriculturalists and non-payment of the tax led to massive eviction. The British land policy was unforsighted that implemented hastily and made no proper analysis of the ground realities. Therefore it seriously affected the agrarian social structure of entire state. The introduction of Private ownership of the land made Jenmis more powerful. The population and pressure of land increased further and evictions, rack renting, excessive lease renewal fees and poor compensation for tenant's improvements reached its acme and left the peasantry in extremely miserable condition. The Peasants were subjected to the exploitation of both local land lords and colonialists. Compounded with Great Economic Depression, the scarcity of essential commodities made the situation explosive. Therefore discontent became widespread which was expressed in the form agitations. In

1931 Communist League was started by a group of young nationalists in Travancore. The Communist League mobilized the peasants and agricultural labourers to fight against landlordism and colonialism. In 1933 Valluvanadu Nikuthi Dayaka Sangham was formed.

In 1934, at Pattambi there was a meeting of the peasants where NG Ranga was participated. Shortly after the meeting a Kerala Karshaka Sangham was formed with EMS as the President and C K Govindan Nair as secretary. In May 1934 Congress Socialist Party was formed in Kerala. A meeting chaired by Kelappan was held in Calicut for this purpose and a seven member committee was appointed for mobilizing the people against land lordism and colonialism. The formation of Congress Socialist Party was a significant milestone because CSP could organize the people through mobilizing them into various mass organisations. Under the auspices of the Congress Socialist Party, a conference was held at Calicut in 1935. The Conference decided to launch was the movement of peasants for abolition of landlordism, removal of indebtedness and for the improvement of the working conditions of agricultural labourers. As KKN Kurupnotes, "In Travancore and Cochin, the native feudalistic governments introduced certain agrarian legislations in the second half of the nineteenth century to fulfil the requirements of fixity of tenure, fair rent and free transfer and thereby facilitate capital investments in coffee and tea plantations by the European capitalists and joint stock companies. These legislations and their amendments and the subsequent legislations like the Nair Regulations against the matrilineal system, a feudal institution, in the long-run weakened the traditional feudal class and landlordism." [28]

The formation of All India Kisan Sabhafurther strengthened the protest movements against landlordism and Colonialism. The All India Kisan Congress stood for the abolition of various types of landlordisms like Zamindari, Ryotwari, Mahalvari, Jenmi and Inamdari that prevailed across the country. The All India Kisan Sabha stood for complete economic emancipation of the peasantry and the achievement of full economic and political power for the peasants and workers and all other exploited classes. When the protest movements became strong the colonialists took measures to suppress it. In 1934 Communist Party of India was banned and the newspapers and literature of the communists were seized by Colonial government.

The widespread demand for agrarian reforms forced the both Travancore and Cochin to bring further legislation dealing with land reforms. In Travancore, Travancore Land Tax Proclamation of 1946 was introduced. The proclamation was an attempt to bring the whole of the assessed lands under a uniform rate of assessment. Other lands belonging to *sreepandaravaka*, *sreepadam*, *kandhukrishi* and *edavagai* were charged a uniform tax. Since the rate of tax was same irrespective of the nature of the yield or fertility, the owners of the fertile lands benefited more than the others. Therefore more problems in connection with the tenancy crop up. Though the legislations were a little effective, more reforms needed to face the new situation.

In Cochin State government introduced a slew of measures and legislations in order to mitigate problems in tenurial systems aggravated by colonial rule Great Economic Depression. Cochin Government was appointed the Landlord Tenant Commission to study the problems of the tenants in 1909. On the basis of the recommendations of the Commission, the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1914 was passed. It gave fixity of tenure to those who were holding lands before 1885. On the basis of the Act, any tenant irrespective of the

terms under which he occupied and cultivated the land. At the time of eviction tenants were entitled to compensation according to the method of payment prescribed by the Act. The Act also had provisions for enhancement and reduction of rent and resumption of land by *jennies* under certain circumstances. But the Tenancy Act was not able to settle all the issues in the tenure system in Cochin. The disputes between landlords and tenants increased. Impact of Great the economic Depression further worsened the situation. There was a heavy hike in land tax following depression related economic problems .Tenants were unable to pay heavy taxes imposed upon them. Consequently there were Evictions on massive scale. Poverty and heavy burden of taxation made their life more miserable.

To overcome this, the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938 was passed. This Act broadened the definition of *kanam* tenancy and more categories of inferior tenants were included in it. The Act gave fixity of tenure to *kanam* tenants of private land. But it was subjected to various conditions. The permanency was only for a period of twelve years subject to the Payment of renewal fees. This act permitted eviction, in the event of the denial of the landlord's title or if the landlord needed the land for constructing a residence for himself. It is obvious that a liberal interpretation of such provisions would favour the landlord.

1.1 Tenurial Changes in Travancore-Cochin State

All the previous legislations gave no respite to the tenant and permanently affected the process of land reforms. It was Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 included the provision for abolition of both landlordism and tenancy in Kerala. It provided hutment dwellers the option to purchase his homestead from the land owners on easy terms and conferred the ownership of land under tenancy to the cultivating tenants. It limited ceiling to 20 acres per family.Tenancy legislations in Travancore Cochin and were mutually influenced a lot. The impact of the land tenure legislations in Travancore and Cochin State between 1865 and 1949 was carried over to the next stage and also to modern Kerala, with its merits and defects.

After Indian Independence in 1947 there were changes in the native states as well. The policy of merger and integration of native states initiated by the State Ministry of the Government of India under the guidance of Sardar Vallabai Patel had improved the prospects of the early formation of a united Kerala. The native State of Travancore and the nearby Cochin State were integrated together to form into one state, Travancore-Cochin on 1 July, 1949. In the meantime Cochin State had made attempts to improve the agrarian system in the region. A Committee had been constituted in Cochin to study on the agrarian aspects. The Cochin Agrarian Problem Enquiry Committee had been constituted in 1947. The Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Siwasamy, submitted its report two years later. Though the report brought to light the problems of the existing agrarian system and suggested remedies, the political changes like the integration of Cochin with Travancore came in the way of implementation. At the time of the integration of the Travancore-Cochin States, the rulers of both States agreed to constitute two independent bodies. They were the *Travancore Dewaswom* Board and The *Cochin Dewaswom* Board, to manage all temples, both the *sircar* and private in the respective areas. The control of the temple lands by these bodies intensified the existing issues in tenancy system in the state. It was Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 which finally put an end to all tenant issues in Travancore and Cochin State.

CONCLUSION

The Great Depression had a terrible impact on the Indian farmer. While there was a steady, uninhibited increase in land rent, the value of the agricultural produce had come down to alarming levels. Therefore, having incurred heavy losses, the farmers were compelled to sell off their valuables including ornaments in order to meet the expenses of daily life.

The Great Depression coupled with the diverse tenurial systems further aggravated the situation of tenants in Travancore and Cochin. It was the land reforms after the attainment of independence finally put an end to the hardships of the peasants and contradictions in all previous land tenurial systems in Travancore and Cochin. The colonial rulers never attempted to find solutions tenurial problems in Travancore and Cochin State but were taking advantage of the situation for maintaining their power over the land. It was Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 which finally put an end to all tenant issues in Travancore and Cochin State during pre-depression and post-depression period.

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- [2] See *Report of the Agrarian Problems Enquiry Committee*, p. 53.
- [3] *The Land Tax Proclamation of 1946*
- [4] T. K. Gopala Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk: A Systematic Description of the Social Customs and Institutions of Malabar*, pp.254-255.
- [5] It was only the various temporary enactments which came after 1957 which stayed the eviction of *varamdars* (share cropper) and the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963, that recognised the position of the varomdars like other tenants.
- [6] M.A. Oommen, *Land Reforms and Socio Economic Change in Kerala*, pp.18-19.
- [7] *Land Reform Survey in Kerala, 1966-67*, p.14.
- [8] *Jenmi-Kudiyan Regulation of 1896*
- [9] These taluks which formed part of the South Kanara district were integrated to Kerala at the time of the States Re-organisation in 1956.
- [10] *Land Reform Survey in Kerala, 1966-67*, p.18.
- [11] M.A. Oommen, *op. cit.*, p.21.
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